

President's Report to the Board

For the period from June 11 to Sept. 30, 2020
Submitted to the TRU Board of Governors
By Brett Fairbairn, President and Vice-Chancellor

This report summarizes progress to date on priorities of the executive team for 2020/2021. It also includes university highlights since the last reporting period.

Priorities

Institutional Resilience and Capacity-Building:

Leadership and culture

Building an engaged workforce and strong culture—a primary focus in recent months for faculty and staff has been preparation for the fall term, our busiest time of year. Faculty spent the summer transitioning courses for virtual delivery. Many participated in workshops on best practices in virtual learning and faculty continue to have access to a wealth of support through the Centre for Excellence in Learning and Teaching, Open Learning's Learning Technology and Innovations team, as well as IT Services.

Most employees continue to work remotely and are able to take advantage of health and wellness supports offered by HR as they navigate work and life in a pandemic. And for other employees—about 30 percent—the last month has represented a return to campus. Some, in order to support in-person learning, and for others, to assist students in other ways. For each of these employees and their work areas, strict protocols are in place to ensure safety.

The work TRU is doing in building an engaged workforce and strong culture has changed due to the unforeseen impact of the pandemic, although the TRU Leaders program (a leadership development program for new managers) has continued along with other initiatives led by Human Resources.

As we've navigated COVID-19 with our employees, there are both heart-wrenching and heartwarming experiences. Some of our employees have experienced much instability while others are excited about opportunities—such as in teaching and research—presented by the pandemic.

Our Human Resources team has worked tirelessly in supporting managers and employees as we've had to reduce our workforce to address the financial impact of COVID-19. These have been difficult decisions and conversations and we are acutely aware of the hardship placed on individuals. We have also moved forward with an early retirement package to further reduce labour costs.

Appointments—Professor Daleen Millard, LLD, will join TRU Nov. 1 as Dean of the Faculty of Law. Daleen comes from the University of Johannesburg (UJ), where she held the position of Vice-Dean of the Faculty of Law since 2016, and was concurrently Vice-Dean of Teaching and Learning until 2019. Her work focused on quality control, decolonization and the effective use of technology in teaching and learning. Prior to becoming vice-dean, Daleen joined UJ as an associate professor in 2007 and has been a professor of private law since 2012, specializing in law of delict, law of contract and insurance law. Chris Adam will continue as Interim Dean until Oct. 31.

Michael Bluhm, Associate Vice-President Strategic Enrolment and University Registrar, has been reappointed for a second five-year term. During his first term, Mike provided leadership, direction and accountability for the Division of Enrolment Services, the operations of the Registrar's office, and strategic enrolment planning. A significant and ongoing project under Mike's leadership is fostering an institutional strategic enrolment mindset and building TRU's Strategic Enrolment Management (SEM) plan, which plays a key role in student success.

Stakeholder Connections

Relationships—the pandemic has underscored TRU's critical connections with our regional communities and our province. We are looking ahead with a shared mindset of how we support a healthy, stable and sustainable recovery from the pandemic.

In working towards this, our activities and involvement with sector organizations have increased dramatically, notably through the Research Universities' Council of BC and Universities Canada. These organizations advocate on behalf of our sector, provincially and federally, respectively. They have raised important pandemic-related issues with governments such as: student financial aid, supports for students and institutions in adapting to the virtual learning environment, the unique concerns of international students, and how universities are integral to economic and social recovery.

At TRU, we are doing similar work, meeting with various individuals and groups, discussing how TRU can support regional communities and the province in rebuilding from the pandemic. We have developed a [document](#) to support these discussions as we look toward potential partnerships that will provide mutual benefit for TRU, our students, and communities.

Relationships are two-way and we are stepping up and supporting our communities, as exemplified through involvement in the Kamloops Mayor's Task Force on Economic Recovery. The task force's input into this process is complete, but there is more work to be done through implementation of recommendations, including those that involve TRU.

Strategic Change Goals:

Students – Balance and Achievement Gaps

SEM Plan—work to develop a Strategic Enrolment Management (SEM) plan is in its final stages. This initiative began in February 2019, included a highly consultative process, and will guide TRU for the next 10 years in maintaining and managing stable enrolment. Stable enrolment is key to ensuring we can fully support student success. With the pandemic arriving a year into our planning, we needed to slightly shift focus to ensure the plan addressed our current pandemic realities. Hence, the first few years will focus on recovery of domestic and international enrolment. The executive looks forward to presenting the SEM plan to the board in December.

Research Leadership

Provincial Research Chair—TRU along with the Province and Interior municipalities (Kamloops, Kelowna and Prince George) was pleased to announce in July, \$5 million in provincial funding to establish a new research chair at TRU. This position—focused on predictive services, emergency management and fire science—will benefit the entire province on future management, prevention and response to wildfires. The search for this critical position is underway.

Strategic Research Plan—work continues on updating TRU's Strategic Research Plan. This has included an external review of our research operations, a standard practice across the sector which involves input from other university colleagues. This provides important feedback as we consider priorities and growth in our research capacity in the next five years.

Capital projects:

September saw the completion of TRU's new space that will house our nursing programs—the Chappell Family Building for Nursing and Population Health. This building represented many years of hard work and dedication from a variety of individuals who moved this project from vision to reality. While the pandemic has delayed our full use of the facility, our nursing students will still be able to access the labs for important hands-on learning.

The pandemic's impact on TRU's budget has resulted in the deferral of approximately \$10 million in capital projects, but where able, we were able to proceed with some projects with funding allocated from our capital reserves. This included the move of the Library to the Brown Family House of Learning, bringing the Library and related services under one roof. We also proceeded on other time-sensitive projects including the public realm space around the Chappell Family Building, and our work with the City of Kamloops to upgrade utilities on McGill Road.

University Highlights

Universities are places of knowledge creation and transfer and achievement. We have much to celebrate. Below represents a short listing of some of our recent activities and achievements. Much more can be found on [TRU's Newsroom](#).

- Sustainability honours—TRU has once again received [kudos for its sustainability efforts](#). The Sierra Club has ranked TRU North America's third Coolest School; last year TRU was first. Additionally, the university made Princeton Review's 2021 Green Honour Roll (ranking 21st out of 695 colleges and universities in the US and Canada).
- Researching COVID-19 prevention—supported by a \$50,000 NSERC Alliance Grant, Drs. John Church, Joanna Urban and Kingsley Donkor are working toward the development of an antiviral nasal spray and mouthwash with a goal of preventing the spread of COVID-19. For more on their research including the interesting mix of ingredients under the microscope, read the [newsroom story](#).
- Supporting students in need—TRU has launched a [First-Year Student Resiliency Fund](#), an acknowledgment of the extraordinary financial challenges some students have experienced this year due to the COVID-19 pandemic. TRU aims to raise \$50,000 to provide up to 100 first-year students with tuition support.